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During summers and on Saturdays, 200 motivated academically and culturally disadvantaged Negro 15- and 16-year-olds participated in Project Enrichment, undertaken at Jackson State College in Mississippi from 1961 to 1964. The students were encouraged to achieve and to participate in intellectual and social activities to change the ill effects of discrimination which they had experienced. (BD)

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Affective Climate and the Disadvantaged

WHAT more appropriate time and what more appropriate place to examine an affective climate of learning and teaching than in the years between 1961 and 1964 in Mississippi?

At that time and in that State, children, young people and adults in and out of school were (a) driven by fear of allowing feelings of aggression to replace the former apparently submissive surface; (b) influenced by rising hopes of gaining more fully their rights; (c) swayed by the day-by-day range from optimism about what they might now become in a nonsegregated life to *fear* that in the little time available they might not be able to fully qualify; (d) overjoyed with the relief of throwing off a protective covering of satisfaction with things as they are; and (e) torn between the *guilt* of going counter to some of the older more conservative generation and *loyalty* to the values they themselves held dear.

In the midst of violence, discontent, anger, bitterness; during a hot summer of sit-ins and other demonstrations for civil rights in a region which often seemed quite far away in beliefs and practices from the rest of the United States, what more appropriate time and place to show the power and glory of eternal ideas; to share a flowering of the spirit which produced new courage, calmness, tranquility and balance?

What more appropriate time and place to wage battle against the hopelessness of "I, only I, am left," and to convince oneself anew that one can "live in such a way as to force men to look beneath the skin"? So wrote one of the teachers who worked with other teachers and the young people from 1961-64 in channeling instead of ignoring the revolutionary spirit of the times. This work was carried out in such fashion that 15- and 16-year-olds, whose similar age group five years ago would have had not the haziest idea of what they wanted or how to get it, were begging and willing to work and sacrifice for the more rapid acquisition of knowledge, skills, attitudes and ways of behaving. They recognized their need for help (a) that would enable them to win scholarships, such as the National Merit Scholarship and the Woodrow Wilson Scholarship and (b) that would then open doors for them to previously withheld economic and social opportunities, and allow them participation in the mainstream of American life.

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This account makes no claims to being a sociological research study or a pedagogical treatise. It is merely a story of exciting and intensely moving work with a special sampling of Mississippi principals and teachers and of students chosen from many Mississippi high schools as the three best in the 9th, in the 10th and in the 11th grades in that particular school. It is a story, not of experimental and control groups, statistical data, and scientific instruments of evaluation but of intangible yet important elements of learning and teaching influenced (a) by attitudes, values, interests and emotional biases brought to Jackson State College by young people and teachers as a result of participation in the emotional life and of personal experiences in home towns, in schools, in families, and (b) by attitudes, values, interests and emotional biases changed by contact with the personality pattern and the way of life of the faculty and student body of Jackson State College. It is a story of what a college found in carefully assessing the values, attitudes, interests, fears, and hopes of the students and teachers and of what the college did in bold new planning to create an affective climate more favorable to learning and teaching.

A Special Group of Disadvantaged

Indeed this is no story of the culturally disadvantaged in general, lumped together, stereotyped and identical. Rather it is a story of 200 individuals deprived in more or less degree by the culture in which they, their parents, and grandparents lived; selected by the dedicated search of zealous counselors, teachers and principals for worthy young people who, they believed, are destined to be sparks to burst into eternal and self-perpetuating spiritual flames all over Mississippi.

During the period 1961-64 the young people had come on Saturdays and during the summers for work in "Project Enrichment." Valiant was the name for these young people as they attacked deficiencies of intellectual preparation which in competition with the better students of the nation's top high schools would have caused them to suffer agonies. Reservoir of Talent, the official term for the students, soon became—because of the students' dauntlessness—Reservoir of the Spirit.

Admittedly the students were economically and educationally deprived. Indeed two typical students matter-of-factly and without self-pity gave an insight into the economic level by saying: "My mother is a common laborer and earns $26 a week. My father is a caretaker and earns $45 a week." "My mother is a maid and makes $64 a month. My father is a mechanic and farmer and he earns around $300 a month."

In like manner two other students say of their educational background: "My mother attended elementary and one year in high school in Madison County, Mississippi (a rural school). My father attended school in Pocohontas, Mississippi, a rural area. He finished the sixth grade. My ambition is to attend college." "I have attended public schools in Pachuta since grade one. My father completed the 8th grade in a rural school in Madison County, Mississippi. I hope very much to become an IBM Programmer or a mathematician. I want to get my Ph.D. before I stop. I will need help but I will 'beat the unbeatable foe; and dream the impossible dream.'"

The students were socially and psychologically deprived. Not one of them and not one of their parents had ever

had the benefit of full participation in the entire culture—pitifully little though it was in most places—of their own state and local communities. Their values, attitudes and interests had been subjected to the strain of the role assigned them and all their people by the Mississippi way of life. All their lives they had been subjected to never-ceasing discrimination and segregation which could damage values, emotions, interests, longings and aspirations.

They were academically disadvantaged by years of inadequate education by teachers who were themselves products of an impoverished social environment and of generations of inadequate education. They were characterized by slovenly mastery of facts, by a submissive and docile instead of an active and aggressive attack on books, ideas and problems. They were outstandingly inadequate in language patterns.

On the other hand, and most fortunately, in the cases of practically all the 200, family influences had prevented segregation from taking its full crippling toll in feelings of inferiority, rejection, bitterness, and hostility. By some kind of blessed dual development the students had managed up to this time to dissociate their basic underlying selves and personalities from the socially defined role assigned to them as Negroes in Mississippi. Above all else the students had high morale and purpose.

Assessment of Affective Factors in Learning

It was easy enough for the Jackson State College faculty to administer SCAT, STEP, and the College Entrance Tests. It was easy enough, though very depressing, to find that the group did not come up to academic standards and norms; that it had less than standard academic know-how; less than desired school culture and far less than average test-taking techniques. It was much more difficult but infinitely rewarding to find the tremendous motivational aspects, the large untapped resources in the individual giving him such great power; to recognize, welcome and allow freedom to work to the emotional concomitants locked in each of the 200 students without one exception.

Working with the motivational aspects of students meant working too, and especially at this time of the underground revolution in Mississippi, with the fears of the students. The students feared that their parents would lose their jobs if the students made a contribution to achieving human dignity even though the contribution was a quiet nonviolent attack instead of the vortex of a civil-rights hurricane.

The students experienced a peculiarly insidious—whether or not always justified—kind of fear that made momentous, weighty decisions of more or less routine things. These decisions varied from (a) going to a rest-room; (b) reporting a bus driver who was deliberately segregating after the company approved integrating; (c) filling in an application blank for the Senate Youth Forum or for any national activity going through state channels; (d) inviting to the college the U.S. Vice-President or any other national figure favorable to or connected with Civil Rights; to (e) greeting the First Lady at Biloxi; to (f) wondering, in taking the examination for the Senate Youth Forum: "Did I really fail to qualify or were all the 20 of us disqualified from the very beginning because of race?" or talking in the U.S. Capitol to one's Senator from Mississippi.

The last incident is particularly illus-

trative of the special calibre of fear. For instance, one of the students attending a U.N. Seminar was scheduled for and went for an informal friendly talk with his representative, just as each of the other students was scheduled for a conference with the national representative from his respective state. Within a short period this senator, supposedly busy with important national and international affairs, reported the informal conversation to state education authorities, and again —whether justified or not—principals and administrators even higher up were explaining and perhaps worrying.

The college then channeled the students' fears and made these fears productive and not destructive. The staff showed students how to select some things from all that was happening around them, and to ignore other things in order to achieve some of the serenity necessary to cope with the tremendous jobs they had to do in changing themselves, their communities and in some respects their parents.

In assessing the group's feelings and emotions which affected learning, the college, through Project Enrichment, discovered many assets. The students, for instance, had a consuming concern with changing existing conditions; a concern which showed none of the hostility, embittered resentment, hatred and self-hatred, the futility, the despair, the hopelessness of some of the city's culturally disadvantaged. They had not so much developed ability and talent as the right attitudes towards ability, life and responsibilities. They had self confidence.

In their own schools and communities even the most disadvantaged in the group had been looked up to and given positions of leadership. They had been admired by everybody when they stayed in high school and graduated, and in effect they had been told by parents, relatives and friends, "We think you're wonderful."

For instance, one parent with no formal education said with so much pride in the family scholar—"Mary is the first of all of our family to have come this far, and to think of her in college! Everywhere she goes she has her books. Her father and I wonder if the studying will hurt her." The parents' attitude was shared by her church people and all the neighbors.

Not only did the students have a burning desire for achievement, but their parents had a willingness to make any sacrifice. For instance, one grandmother, on welfare, said, "I'll try to give Mary all my welfare check if that will help her to go to New York when the others go. I want her to learn everything."

What the College Does

What was the college's recipe for making use of student assets and for changing attitudes, interests and values that needed changing? First the college said to the 200 students, "We expect great things of you," for it realized that to expect little was to get less. Also the college said, in effect, "We shall see that we help you to achieve great things." The college let the students share not just the buildings and physical equipment, but it let them see beneath the surface of the college personality the web of personal relationships, the midnight vigil, the quiet sacrifice, and the unspoken longings and dreams that had to be made reality. Some of the college students mirroring the best aspects of the college personality and culture served as counselors and leaders for the culturally disadvantaged group in the dormitory.

Through tours, telephone interviews with distinguished leaders and tele-lecture courses carried on in cooperation with Stephens College and other means, the college pushed into comparatively bold new areas, dramatizing learning, and showing that thinking is not segregated; that there is no color line in the world of ideas. The college, through its *Meet the Professor* series, provided model and master teachers with whom the students on the campus matched aspirations and shared stimulating, exciting knowledge in the humanities and sciences.

The college capitalized, too, on the tremendous feeling of achievement and the Reservoir of the Spirit measured by what the students did with what they had. In the students and in the high school teachers a kind of "world to conquer" "mountains to climb" spirit developed that made them dare many things.

Among the young people who represented a cross section of the 200 was one who dared write a radio script and a television script, which indirectly caused the group to be accepted on the Mike Wallace News Program; and another who dared visit Europe with the International Affairs Seminar and returned to talk to the community on the European Common Market and about many other aspects of the trip.

A New Dedication

The work with the 200 selected culturally-disadvantaged students on Saturdays and in summer in the period 1961-64 was many things.

First, it was the discovery that the fastest and most effective way of overcoming the students' academic deficiencies produced by the impersonal effects of segregation and the impoverished social environment was (a) by the full use of the motivational aspects of student personality, and (b) by making the most of the affective climate permeating the faculty, college students, and school and college communities.

Second, it was the pleasure (trivial though it might seem) of working with students who were at the stage of social mobility in which they were favorable to lovely, considerate, and dignified manners and were favorable to looking very neat and attractive. For instance, to such an extent was this true (about manners, dignity, etc.) that on the Workshop-on-Wheels trips to New York, Chicago, Nashville, etc., students impressed everyone with their excellent behavior as well as with their alertness.

Third, it was the magnificence (if that word can be used of simple things) of the students' courage to overcome all obstacles ranging from poor study habits and old reading difficulties to more deep-seated and significant obstacles.

Fourth, it was the effort to use all the students' under-the-surface emotions of hate, fear and anger and to help them translate a justified protest into a workable program and into constructive action.

Fifth, it was the discovery and use of something which was not just Mississippian, Southern, even, or American but universal; namely, the appeal in learning and teaching the volcanic force of aspirations, longings, attitudes, interests and values. It was the teachers and students marked by a new measure of dedication imposed by crucial responsibilities in a state and world in crisis; teachers and students marked by the courage to lead and by the capacity to achieve.

Whether Project Enrichment was able to channel all those values, emotions, longings, interests, etc., so that they in-

fluenced learning favorably for the 200 students; whether it taught getting along with human beings by making the student so secure that he could fight quiet battles of prejudice in terms not merely of black and white but of understanding between people; whether it resulted not only in the student's ability to engage in intellectual life but in ability to enjoy it; whether it changed the lives of pupils and teachers so that there was a sustained concern for human values, for spiritual sensitivity and regard for the human spirit was difficult to *prove* with *scientific evidence*. The true evaluation of the project lies not only in the future of Mississippi and other states in which the participants will live and work but in the underdeveloped and culturally disadvantaged countries of the world in which the participants and persons influenced by them may also live and work in years to come.